

Document electronically
generated from the
United Nations
Optical Disk System

E/AC.70/1996/NGO/1
12 January 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATION WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
Third session
8-19 January 1996
Agenda item 2

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATION
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the World Federation of United Nations
Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative
status with the Economic and Social Council (category I)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* * *

In its fiftieth anniversary year, the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) is honoured to address this session of the Working Group. As most of you are aware, WFUNA is an international non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I. WFUNA was one of the first non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to receive consultative status and has been working actively in support of the United Nations for the past 50 years.

On 2 February 1996 the United Nations Postal Administration will be issuing a series of stamps and a souvenir card to commemorate this very special anniversary of WFUNA. The following message from the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, will appear on the souvenir card that will be issued next month:

"The World Federation of United Nations Associations has a central role to play in democratizing the United Nations. Thousands of individuals from United Nations associations, and indeed other non-governmental

96-00723 (E)



/...

organization, around the world who work voluntarily to promote the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations could be described as the incarnation of the compelling declaration with which the Preamble to the Charter begins: 'We the peoples of the United Nations ...'

"I commend WFUNA and its member United Nations associations for the valuable contribution they have made during the past 50 years in mobilizing popular support for the work and goals of the United Nations. Together, we will dedicate the next half century to a new collective effort in favour of peace, development and democracy."

It is precisely this future partnership that WFUNA would like to discuss.

WFUNA's main mission is to promote public understanding of the United Nations and to mobilize public support for its activities. There are 90 national member United Nations associations in all regions of the world, two thirds of which are in developing countries.

WFUNA's leadership has very great experience in the NGO community at the United Nations. Two Secretaries-General of WFUNA have served as President of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO), Mr. Horace Perera and Dr. Marek Hagmajer. Annabelle Wiener, Deputy Secretary-General, has served as First Vice-President of CONGO. In addition, she has served as Chairman of the Department of Public Information NGO Executive Committee and continues to serve on this Committee as an ex-officio member.

Though the importance of this may seem self-evident, it is worth stating at this time to illustrate the value of the diversity in the NGO community, distinguished by the present arrangements for consultation with NGOs.

However, there are those who would like to remove the distinction between the NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and those associated with the Department of Public Information (DPI) - in effect, to put all NGOs in the same category.

Because WFUNA is an NGO that both has consultative status and is associated with DPI, we know the root of the problem well. The DPI NGOs look upon the difference in status as a caste system or power struggle. It is certainly neither. Each has specific important duties and obligations to fulfil. The DPI NGOs are concerned with the dissemination of information on the United Nations, and the consultative NGOs on policy issues in the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs. These two bodies of NGOs must be kept separate.

The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is already overburdened; imagine what it would be like for them also to have to go through the process of having to review all of the DPI NGOs.

WFUNA is confident that the purpose of this review is to build on the positive experience of present arrangements for consultation, to provide new possibilities for NGO contribution and to extend participatory rights to those NGOs that do not enjoy consultative status. It is necessary to make sure,

/...

however, that those NGOs that already have consultative status maintain all the rights already provided to them through Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations provides for "arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations". Subsequently, Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV), in part I, paragraphs 1 through 8, specifies the requirements which must be fulfilled to obtain recognition as an international non-governmental organization. In fact, these paragraphs constitute the definition of international non-governmental organizations. Very similar criteria for recognition are applied by the Union of International Associations in the Yearbook of International Organizations.

In WFUNA's view, the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) concerning the definition of international NGOs are satisfactory and should be strictly observed in granting consultative status. A viable definition of national NGOs must be determined.

All other entities, such as business groups, universities and municipalities, do not fall under the category of international NGOs and therefore should not be included in this group. However, taking into account the utility of expert contributions that these entities can make, it may be worthwhile to consider for them a separate form of recognition.

The situation of NGOs with regard to international conferences convened under United Nations auspices is far from satisfactory and requires urgent adoption of uniform and consistent rules. Although the recent international conferences admitted more NGOs as observers than in the past, these NGOs were not given any real participatory rights. This raised a lot of complaints and discontent, including suppositions that the United Nations is not truly interested in NGO participation.

In our opinion, the rules for the conferences should grant similar rights to those that NGOs enjoy with the Economic and Social Council, and these rights should be allowed to be exercised from the beginning of the preparatory process. WFUNA is ready to submit, at an appropriate time, a concrete proposal concerning such rules.

WFUNA would like to emphasize that in the case of international conferences, the rules should be uniform for NGOs in consultative status and other NGOs admitted by special procedures, like those for recent international conferences.

In this context, WFUNA wishes to point out that the term "accreditation" appears nowhere in Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV). The very fact of having been granted consultative status gives an NGO access and participatory rights without any further scrutiny. It also carries with it the right to register (not be accredited) as observer at any time during the sessions of the Council (and its subsidiary bodies) or international conferences, as well as to benefit from adequate seating arrangements.

Earlier in this statement WFUNA expressed the view that the definition of international NGOs contained in Economic and Social Council resolution

/...

1296 (XLIV) requires no changes. However, in connection with international conferences there is a need to elaborate a definition of a national NGO. WFUNA is convinced that for the benefit of the substantive work of conferences, the legitimacy of those who wish to be accepted as observers must be verified, especially taking into account that WFUNA advocates the granting of full participatory rights to NGOs not in consultative status, and that the newly emerging public movements are composed not only of NGOs, but also of unstructured interest or pressure groups whose constituency and outreach is difficult to verify. For business groups, universities and other entities, some special forms of acceptance and provisions for contributions may be devised.

Human beings have, throughout history, organized themselves into groups to pursue common ideas and goals. Some well-known examples in recent times are the international movements for disarmament and peace, environmental groups, the anti-apartheid coalitions and the world-wide mobilization for the rights of women. Also, more recently, we have witnessed the growing importance of national and international groups concerned with sustainable development and human rights issues. All these groups have, naturally, sought an international outreach, wanted to establish world-wide networks and asked to be heard at the United Nations and its conferences.

WFUNA warmly welcomes all those who want to work with the United Nations and encourages the United Nations system to respond with equal warmth and openness. WFUNA has clearly stated, on several occasions, the need to open the United Nations doors as broadly as possible. Thus, WFUNA appeals to the Working Group to build on the positive experience of present arrangements and, more important, to provide for new opportunities for NGO participation. WFUNA strongly urges the extension of participatory rights to those NGOs that do not now have consultative status. However, it is most important that any process of opening up the United Nations to new NGOs, whether national or international in scope, be structured, transparent and consistent. As stated earlier, such a process must not infringe on present participatory rights.

WFUNA would be very pleased indeed to see any of its member United Nations associations granted consultative status, since there are times that WFUNA, as a federation, must speak with one voice, and there are times that United Nations associations have their own views and expertise to be expressed.

WFUNA wishes to underline that it is conscious of management problems which may result in accepting too many NGOs to the Economic and Social Council or to international conferences. We do not think that the solution to the problem is imposing on NGOs forms of "clustering" or creating "constituencies" or "major groups". It seems to us that as the first measure, more caution should be exercised in granting status or admission to conferences.

The recent Fourth World Conference on Women was a perfect example of the problem WFUNA would like to bring to your attention. There were so many NGOs registered for the Conference that it was decided by the Conference secretariat on site that those NGOs who already had consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and who were not "women's groups" should not be given the right to speak, on the premise that they could always be heard in the Council. National and local organizations were given priority over the NGOs in

/...

consultative status. It was, frankly, a disgrace. WFUNA did speak but there were many other NGOs that should have been given the right to speak and were denied the privilege.

Finally, WFUNA wishes to emphasize again that increased NGO participation requires properly increased logistical services from the Secretariat. The NGO Section should be strengthened by upgrading its capability to cope with not only its normal duties, to serve the Working Group but also to meet the challenge it will face after the United Nations doors have been widely opened.

In view of the fact that the new Economic and Social Council resolution is expected to regulate United Nations-NGO relations for the next several years, we suggest that the text omit what could be termed unnecessary ideological or political references contained in the introduction and in some other parts of the text. A sound legal document should not include such statements for the simple reason that they often leave open the possibility of unfortunate or controversial interpretations. A brief statement of guiding principles that underlie the resolution is probably more desirable and could easily be formulated.

We are deeply concerned that the participatory rights of NGOs are in danger of being significantly curtailed by several provisions in the proposed draft resolution. For example, we object to:

- The conditionality attached to the circulation by the Secretary-General of written statements of NGOs (para. 31);
- Imposing the requirement to coordinate joint oral and written submissions by NGOs (paras. 11 and 51).

Finally, WFUNA would like to re-emphasize its readiness to offer its expertise in the further drafting of a new resolution governing these extremely important consultative arrangements between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/AC.70/1996/NGO/2
11 January 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
Third session
8-19 January 1996
Agenda item 2

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATION
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by World Wide Fund for Nature International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Category I); Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights, Habitat International Coalition, International Commission of Jurists, International Service for Human Rights, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation, OXFAM (United Kingdom and Ireland), Service, Justice and Peace in Latin America, World Student Christian Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Category II); Asian Cultural Forum on Development, International Movement Against Racism and Racial Discrimination and Women's Environment and Development Organization, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* * *

96-00534 (E) 120196 150196



/...

1. The United Nations stands to benefit from the wealth of cultural and political perspectives of the vigorous civil society emerging in newly democratizing societies, whose voices are seldom heard in New York and Geneva. Such expanded participation is all the more important now that civil society is opening in many regions where opportunities for non-governmental organization action were previously restricted.
2. The purpose of non-governmental organization participation in meetings of the United Nations is to provide the United Nations bodies with expertise and experience that enhance the quality of its deliberations, while expressing the concerns and aspirations of constituencies that might otherwise not be heard.
3. National and regional non-governmental organizations have brought valuable field experience which has proved to be very useful in the drafting of United Nations resolutions, declarations and programmes of action. They recently made constructive contributions to the Working Group on the Drafting of a Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (January 1995), the United Nations Conference on Population and Development (September 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (March 1995), the preparatory committee for Habitat II (April 1995), the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session (May 1995) and the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women (September 1995).
4. The current need to change arrangements with non-governmental organizations to open access to the United Nations should not diminish the existing non-governmental organization rights and best practices of participation nor adversely affect the consultative status of those non-governmental organizations at present holding that status. The review should result in an expansion of non-governmental organization participatory rights, including rights in the Committees of the General Assembly.
5. Direct access to the United Nations for national and regional non-governmental organizations will not undermine international solidarity and cooperation but rather, as recent experiences have shown, will contribute to those objectives and enrich the substance of international debates. National non-governmental organizations are not always affiliated to international organizations and should not necessarily have to operate via international non-governmental organizations with whom they may not want or need to be affiliated. Furthermore, new international networks have created different ways for non-governmental organizations from various regions and "sectors" to work together on issues that require flexibility and a willingness to achieve positive changes.
6. International organizations with branches or field offices in several countries may, as an internal matter, preclude those branches and offices from seeking consultative status independently. On the other hand, some national and regional non-governmental organizations are affiliated with international organizations or federations, but not as branches or field offices. Those non-governmental organizations formulate and implement their own policies and operate entirely independently, as autonomous organizations. It is, therefore, both inappropriate and counterproductive for the United Nations Member States to attempt to regulate such internal matters or to exclude in principle national

/...

organizations affiliated to an international or regional non-governmental organization. Therefore national organizations that are affiliated to an international or regional non-governmental organization should be granted consultative status according to the standard criteria of approval, unless the international or regional non-governmental organization concerned objects - but only on the basis of its particular statutory relation with the national or regional affiliate seeking admission.

7. Non-governmental organizations should be granted consultative status on the basis of their competence and expertise within a particular field or on the basis of their representative character.

8. Consultation with the Member State concerned, required by Article 71 of the Charter, should not constitute a process of governmental authorization or clearance. As a government delegate stated in May 1995 to the Working Group: "Consultation does not mean a veto." Non-governmental organizations should have the right to respond to views expressed by a Member State regarding their application for consultative status. The information provided by the Government and the non-governmental organization's response should both be considered by the Committee on non-governmental organizations in making its final decision based on the standard criteria for approval.

9. The Roster category of non-governmental organizations (or a new equivalent) should be maintained since at least it provides minimum access to various United Nations bodies.

10. A clear distinction needs to be made between non-governmental organization participation in occasional United Nations conferences and in the normal meetings of United Nations bodies and committees. The attendance of great numbers of non-governmental organizations at international conferences has only been possible due to the provision of exceptional funds not normally available to them, particularly for national non-governmental organizations from the South. In fact, over the past five years, when there has been an increase of 79 non-governmental organizations with consultative status, participation by non-governmental organizations at regular meetings of United Nations committees has largely remained steady or has even decreased in some instances. For example, at the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, which is one of the best attended regular United Nations meetings, non-governmental organization attendance dropped from 169 organizations in 1993 to 158 in 1994 and 135 in 1995. Oral statements from non-governmental organizations to the Commission were fewer in number in 1994 (337) than in the two previous years (414 in 1993 and 364 in 1992).

11. Due to the high cost (in both finances and time) for non-governmental organizations to participate in United Nations meetings, non-governmental organizations are being more selective about which sessions they attend and are making more use of written submissions and joint actions. It is therefore imperative that non-governmental organization written statements be distributed to all participants of United Nations meetings, at least in the language of their submission, assuming that this is one of the United Nations working languages.

12. It is generally agreed among non-governmental organizations that one of the best ways of reducing the cost of non-governmental organization participation and being effective in United Nations meetings and procedures is for the organizations to cooperate on presenting joint oral and written submissions. The development of strong and organized caucuses has been a positive means of collaboration among like-minded non-governmental organizations. While such coordination is in the interest of the work of non-governmental organizations it should remain their responsibility and not be imposed by the United Nations Member States.

13. There would be more coherence to United Nations/non-governmental organization relations if the practice of granting Roster status to the relevant Commission of those non-governmental organizations registered for a corresponding United Nations conference were universally applied.

14. To respond to the growing contributions of non-governmental organizations to the United Nations, there is urgent need for the non-governmental organization section in the United Nations Secretariat to be strengthened, allocated more resources and its role and methods of operation revised.
